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TAGS: [KPKO](#) [MO](#) [PBTS](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: WESTERN SAHARA: GENERAL MOSGAARD'S VIEWS

Classified By: Pol/C Tim Lenderking for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: MINURSO Force Commander General Kurt Mosgaard told the Ambassador June 8 that MINURSO continued to play an important role in moderating the Western Sahara conflict. He said tensions were up on both sides, and there was more talk of war within the Polisario, but MINURSO does not view a return to war as likely in the near term. Mosgaard said a more likely scenario was an unauthorized sneak attack on the Moroccans by a small group of Polisario soldiers. Mosgaard said the Moroccan security forces were using excessive force in confronting demonstrations, but he acknowledged it was still "light" by regional standards. End Summary.

¶2. (C) In a rare visit to Rabat, MINURSO Force Commander General Kurt Mosgaard (Denmark) met with Ambassador for one hour on June 8 and spoke candidly about the situation in the Western Sahara. Mosgaard was accompanied by a Danish staff officer, while the Ambassador was joined by DCM, Polcouns, Acting DATT, and Army Attache. Ambassador welcomed the visit and asked Mosgaard what other embassies he was visiting in Rabat were primarily focused on in their discussions with him. Mosgaard said most of his discussions centered on the human rights situation in the territory and on the visit of the UN Human Rights Commission.

¶3. (C) While not alarmed, Mosgaard said the risk of conflict in the Sahara was going up. Tensions are rising, and there is no light at the end of the tunnel. The Polisario feels cornered, he said, the latest provocation being the EU fisheries agreement, and there is more talk of war. He said the risk of war was still low in MINURSO's view, but noted the Spanish had concluded in a recent report that the risk of conflict was up "from 5 percent to 10 percent" (comment: Spanish Polcouns relayed the same information to us separately but did not elaborate). Mosgaard said there was no evidence the Polisario had more money or new armaments. They did recently obtain, however, about 150 new four by four land cruisers. There was no evidence either that the Polisario was making money from selling international foodstocks. He noted the diet in the camps is boring, and some refugees barter or sell food supplies from aid agencies with local shopowners. Mosgaard was relatively certain the Polisario was not selling food to buy weapons. DCM pointed out that food divergence was more likely to take place prior to delivery in Tindouf and would likely be hard to observe in

the camps.

¶4. (C) Mosgaard said he believed MINURSO continued to play a vital role in moderating the conflict. There were not enough troops in MINURSO to patrol the entire territory, but MINURSO would be able to witness whether there were any preparations for large-scale military activity by either side with current troop strength. Rather than drawing down Mosgaard favored more aggressive patrolling using modern technology including satellite imagery. He was working with the cartographic division in New York to obtain more detailed maps of the territory; MINURSO observers were still using maps from 1967.

Violations from both sides are down, he said, in part because of MINURSO's more aggressive enforcement of the military agreement.

¶5. (C) Mosgaard estimated Polisario military strength at 3-6000 soldiers but said on any given day there were probably only 1000 troops in the field. MINURSO patrols normally meet only one military commander in the field. He described the Polisario military as "laid back" and on a low state of alert. "Some are friendly to MINURSO, others are not," he said. Mosgaard said his security concern was less a centralized Polisario attack and more a fear that a small group of Polisario soldiers could sneak up to the berm and fire a mortar at the Moroccans. Moroccan head of the Armed Forces General Bennani had threatened to attack Tifariti on several occasions, where the Moroccans allege the Polisario are building government offices. Mosgaard said there is nothing more than the foundations of a building underway in Tifariti. He observed that the construction is not for military purposes, nor is it located within the restricted zone. It is not any more of a concern to MINURSO than all the construction activity in Laayoune, Mosgaard said,

¶6. (C) The Ambassador asked Mosgaard what impact the revitalization of CORCAS has had in the territory. Mosgaard said he rarely has a chance to talk to locals in Laayoune, but he does speak with journalists and other visitors. His impression is that CORCAS has had no practical impact so far, and "people feel they have seen this sort of thing before." He believes there are only about 25,000 Sahrawis in Laayaoune out of a population of more than 200,000. The Sahrawis are generally pro-Polisario, he said.

¶7. (C) Mosgaard said he meets with General Bennani every two months. The relationship is professional but not warm. Mosgaard had issued violations of the military agreement to the Moroccans which Bennani did not like, such as during the King's visit to Laayoune in March, when Moroccan security forces had increased their numbers dramatically. But Mosgaard said Benanni appreciates that MINURSO patrolling has decreased Polisario violations as well.

¶8. (C) Commenting on the human rights situation in the territory, Mosgaard believed that beatings of demonstrators and ransacking of their homes by Moroccan security forces took place regularly. He had not witnessed this himself, however. It was even difficult to witness demonstrations directly. They could take place in a small neighborhood at two in the morning. The Polisario inflated the numbers and the severity of demonstrations, Mosgaard said. As to the Moroccan response, while excesses did occur, Mosgaard said the Moroccan reaction was light by African and Arab standards, though heavy by Danish standards. The Moroccan army is deployed in urban areas, he said, which is a relatively new escalation, but Mosgaard believed the Moroccan military made a strong effort to avoid direct confrontations with demonstrators. They were no such incidents he was aware of.

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